

# RPG Reload File 058 – 'Solomon's Boneyard'

[October 15, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we leave no gravestone unturned. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it's doing in the here and now. It's a chance to go back to old favorites, consider their place in the overall iOS library, or even just to take a deeper dive than our reviews typically allow. The RPG genre is a pretty broad one that I have little interest in precisely defining, but you can count on a wide variety of games appearing here from week to week. If you feel like I've missed something important, let me know by commenting below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#). Since I set the schedule pretty far in advance, I can't promise I'll get to any suggestions soon, but they will go on the master list, which means I'll get to them at some point.

We're well into our October festivities celebrating Hallowe'en here in the **RPG Reload**, with all of this month's picks being spooky or scary somehow, as judged by me, Pumpklor, Prince Of Power. This is our second such celebration, following last year where we covered a few of the more obvious ones. Fortunately, there are quite a few horror-themed RPGs on the App Store for us to choose from, so we should be good for at least a few more years of this tradition. I hope you're enjoying our little celebration of one of my very favorite holidays.



During last year's Hallowe'en celebrations, [we covered](#) *Solomon's Keep* [\(Free\)](#), an enjoyable action-RPG that leaned more on the action side of things thanks to it being set up like a twin-stick shooter. Well, it doesn't feel like Hallowe'en without a visit from Solomon Dark, so this time around, we're covering *Solomon's Boneyard* [\(Free\)](#), the follow-up to *Keep*. With any luck, we'll have another *Solomon* game to talk about next year, but we'll have to wait and see how things go on that front. It's been just over five years since *Solomon's Boneyard* was released in September of 2010. The game is an arena-based prequel to the first game, and as you might guess from the way it appeared scant months after the original game released, it shares quite a bit with its predecessor.

To be perfectly honest, if *Boneyard* weren't related to the first game, I'm not sure if I would have covered it as an **RPG Reload**. It's a great game, but it's even more about the action than the first one is, with most of the streamlining coming from cutting away exploration and what little story *Keep* has. Of course, those elements were far from the strongest bits of *Solomon's Keep*, so it's a not a serious loss to the quality of the experience that they're gone. It's just that it leaves us with something that is decidedly less of an

epic adventure and more of a white-knuckle shoot-em-up with RPG elements. For readers who like slightly more traditional fare, I promise the next couple of weeks will have what you're looking for, but let's enjoy a little light questing and heavy skeleton smashing for this round, okay?

The story in *Solomon's Boneyard* is set 23 years before the events of the first game. At this point, Solomon Dark is seen as nothing more than a minor nuisance by the Wizard's College. As such, when they get reports that he's been spotting digging up graves in a nearby cemetery, they decide to send out only one young apprentice to handle him. Since we know Solomon Dark is alive and well in the previous game, you can pretty much guess how this all goes. The action is, fittingly, contained completely within the confines of the graveyard. There is no escape, not for your character, anyway. There's no way to canonically win this game, so all you can do is take down as many monsters with you as you can. Pretty standard for the twin-stick shooter genre, and another point towards this game being more of an action game fit for small pockets of time.



The RPG elements come through in the leveling and perks systems. As you

defeat enemies, you earn experience points towards raising your character's level. When you level up, you can select one of three randomly offered perks. The longer you can survive, the more powerful you'll be, but once you die, your character will be back to square one next time. What persists is gold, the game's currency, which is dropped in varying amounts by defeated enemies. While experience points and levels make you stronger within each individual run, gold can be used to unlock various perks and bonuses that you can keep forever. Best of all, once you've unlocked a perk, you can choose to bring that specific one into the game with you. You start off able to equip two such perks, but you'll eventually be able to buy two more slots. These perks increase in power and utility in reasonable step with their cost to purchase, so as long as you stick with it, you'll become more and more powerful over time.

Not all of the things you can buy with gold work in that way, however. There are a few gameplay add-ons available in the perks menu if you've got the cash. You can unlock extra stages to play in, the ability for Solomon Dark to summon boss monsters, the aforementioned extra perk slots, and a handful of extra playable characters. Different from the first game, your wizard in *Solomon's Boneyard* isn't a one-mage-fits-all kind of spellcaster. The various spells and perks available to the main character of the first game are separated and split among several characters, giving the player a bit more initial agency in their spell selection at the cost of eventual versatility. You'll start the game with four different wizards to pick from. One has fire spells, another has magic missiles, a third has electricity magic, and the last uses ice magic. Each starts with two spells that you can switch between at your leisure, and those spells can be improved, modified, or even replaced as you level up. Your selection will always be drawn from a narrow pool unique to each character.

In some ways, I prefer this system to the one in *Solomon's Keep*. Since the choices you're presented with upon each level-up are random, there was a much lower chance of being offered something you really needed in the first



game. It can still get a little fuzzy in *Boneyard* sometimes, particularly with the advanced characters capable of fusing spells, but the odds are much higher that each level up will present you with things that you can use, if not necessarily the exact abilities you might want. It might seem like you lose some freedom in customizing your character compared to the first game, but since you can freely choose which character you'd like to use each time, you're not really stifled in the larger sense. Of course, if you like, you can pay an IAP to bribe fate and take the randomness out of the whole affair, but why spoil your fun?



While we're on the topic of the IAP, I'll stop here and say that I strongly recommend throwing a buck or two into *Solomon's Boneyard* when you get started. Grab a big chunk of gold and unlock some of the extra features, like the additional perk slots, extra stages, boss fights, and maybe a wizard or two if you'd like. You don't have to do this, as you'll eventually earn enough gold by playing the game to open all of this up, but as I see it, the game is free and spending even one dollar makes the game a lot more enjoyable off the hop, so why not pay a little? The only downside to this approach is that since gold purchases are consumable IAPs, if you ever delete the game,

you're out that money. Well, there are many worse causes than helping to fund development on Raptisoft's next title, at least.

The game plays pretty much the same way as the first one, with a set-up that simulates two sticks, one for moving and the other for shooting your spell. You can tap buttons on the side of the screen to switch between spells or open your inventory, and that's about it. Using your magic causes your mana to go down, but it will regenerate while you're not using it. The key, then, is to balance your offensives with periods of evasion that allow your mana to refill. The longer you survive, the more enemies Solomon will throw at you, with increasingly powerful creatures filling the ranks. You have to be very careful not to let yourself get surrounded, because death comes swiftly if the bad guys get up close. As leveling up refills both your health and your mana, it sometimes feels like you're just trying to survive from level to level. It's quite tense, and a lot of fun.

Like the first game, *Solomon's Boneyard* benefits greatly from its fine presentation. Even five years after launch, with the last update to the game more than three years ago, it still looks and sounds pretty good. The graveyard is very dark and spooky, and the game uses some eye-catching lighting effects to display the shadows cast by your feeble staff-light. Fortunately, one of the game's last updates added support for retina displays, but since it hasn't been touched since the summer of 2012, the game doesn't support larger iPhone screen sizes, along with any other advancements that have happened since then. Unlike some games lacking that support, it doesn't have much of an effect on the gameplay in *Boneyard*, so it's not a huge deal so much as it's something that would be nice to have.



The unsung hero of the *Solomon* games has to be the audio, though. The enormously catchy theme song from the first game is back in action in the *Boneyard*, along with all the great booms, bangs, and pops that come from your magic maliciously meeting monster meat. Solomon Dark himself once again steals the show with his deep, booming voice. He'll taunt you relentlessly, and unlike the original game, there's nothing you can do about it. I find it fascinating how a fairly plain visual design like Dark's, nothing more than a shadow in a purple cloak, can become larger than life through well-implemented voice work. You'll see more of him in this game, too, since he's always running around and digging into graves on the playfield. You can't do anything to him, though. Well, if he makes you too angry, you can always fire up *Solomon's Keep* and get some revenge.

In addition to the aforementioned retina update, *Solomon's Boneyard* received several updates following its release. Most of the updates came in the first year, adding new content, fixing bugs, and balancing out certain aspects of the game. After that, it was largely maintenance and expanding compatibility. Presumably, Raptisoft got to work on the next *Solomon* game after that, the unfortunate *Solomon Dark*, which was cancelled following a

legal dispute. While the developer has been working on a remake of *Solomon's Keep*, there's no word on whether or not we can expect any further updates or remakes of *Boneyard*. *Solomon Dark* itself was apparently meant to be a remake of sorts, so we might be out of luck. That said, *Solomon's Boneyard* still works quite well and offers plenty of things to do. It doesn't really need anything more, apart from general maintenance.

*Solomon's Boneyard* is a worse RPG than *Solomon's Keep*, but I think it's the better game, if that makes any sense. It focuses on the core strengths of the first game, namely the gloomy atmosphere, the exciting battles against overwhelming foes in confined spaces, and the unique approach to character customization. It does this while shedding elements of the design that didn't work so well, including an abundance of choices on level-ups and momentum-killers like being able to sit around in a safe space as your mana regenerates. The result is a lean, mean, monster-mashing machine of a game, perfect for those occasions when you want a little action-RPG fun but don't have time to wander a map or keep track of quest steps. It's also got just the right mood for the Hallowe'en season.





That's just what I think about *Solomon's Boneyard*, though. What do you all think about it? Which *Solomon* game do you like better, and why? I want to know, so please leave your comments below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). As regular readers know, we also do a monthly podcast, and this month's featured game will be *Solomon's Boneyard*. We like to receive and reply to reader mail on the show, so if you have questions about the game or any other RPG-related topic, please send them to [rpgreloadpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:rpgreloadpodcast@gmail.com). As for me, I'll be back next week with another spooky RPG. Thanks for reading!

**Next Week's Reload:** *Skulls Of The Shogun* [\(Free\)](#)